

EMERY LUCIUS BRADFORD

A Sketch

BY

GEORGE HERBERT PALMER

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Memorandum for the Church Records
on the ministry of E. L. BRADFORD

ON July 28, 1925, EMERY
LUCIUS BRADFORD resigned
his ministry in Boxford after serv-
ing there for twenty-two years.
A service so long is rare nowadays,
and even in his case was not quite
continuous. From 1902 to 1913
he had charge of the church and
of certain civic interests in East
Weymouth. In early life he lost
his left leg, which had to be re-
moved so high up that it was im-

possible to attach an artificial one. For the rest of his life the stump gave him almost continuous pain, making writing as well as parish duties difficult. The call to Weymouth promised beneficial change of air and easier sermonizing. With deep regret on both sides we parted from him and contented ourselves with a few short pastorates. When eleven years later his health was somewhat improved and a change came about in the business arrangements of the town, the Boxford pulpit happened to

fall vacant. To the satisfaction of our entire parish he returned to us, a prominent member of the installing council remarking to me that if Mr. Bradford had had two legs he would be standing in New York rather than among us.

The remark did not overestimate his excellence as a preacher. Seldom do sermons reach so high an average of merit. Whoever heard one wished to hear more. They fed his people. While their language and delivery were always quiet, with nothing striking about

them, little eloquence and no conventional phrases, they were the work of a careful and sincere thinker who said precisely what he meant. He was a thoroughly modern man, finding his religion in human experience rather than in external authority. But he possessed what many modernists lack, perpetual piety, reverence for the Bible and for the rich traditions of the past, and felt also a hearty fellowship with all earnest souls who differed from him in opinion. The admirable literary qualities of Mr.

Bradford's style — its simplicity, depth, ease and beauty — have always been something of a mystery to us. Where did he get them? They must have been self-taught, probably only the natural outcome of similar qualities in himself, shaped by serious effort to meet the needs of his hearers. But they are rare.

In a wide-spread parish, however, where the habit of church-going has not been formed by many and where in those who have it it is often opposed by storms and au-

tomobiles, the pastor's work is at least as important as that of the preacher. It might seem that Mr. Bradford's bodily infirmities should excuse him from laborious visitations. But he is not a man for excuses. All people who live within half a dozen miles of his church he has counted his, and he has wished to see them twice a year and as often besides as affliction or any notable event in their family would make the coming of a friend welcome. Then what tenderness and wisdom were shown! By nature

somewhat shy and inexpressive, he opened himself at once to need. His influence was felt in every home, and from nearly all love came forth to meet him. His modes of conveyance were energetically various. For moderate distances his crutch was as vigorous as a second leg. For longer ones he had a horse, which he took care of himself. Later, he taught himself to ride a bicycle. This was followed by an inexpensive open automobile. Finally his people provided him with a closed one, bringing him to

their doors more readily in winter and at night.

Of course it was natural with such a minister that the Boxford parish should know nothing of cliques and factions and should experience no need of more churches than one. In towns not far away there have been frequent ecclesiastical quarrels, resulting in short pastorates and in several meagerly equipped churches. We have followed the better tradition of harmony, welcoming to our communion persons of widely different

beliefs who were at one in their desire to serve a common Master. Much of this ideal of inclusive kindness we owe to Mr. Coggin, who settled here at the building of the present church, in 1838, continued as its pastor for thirty years, and then lived among us as many more, to the great benefit of the town. The same quiet dignity which shone for so many years in Mr. and Mrs. Coggin appeared again, to our great comfort, in Mr. and Mrs. Bradford. May their unofficial residence among us, now just beginning, be

like that of their predecessors, long, influential, and happy.

Mr. Bradford was born January 16, 1859, in Brooklin, Maine. He graduated from Andover Theological Seminary in 1892. In July of that year he was ordained in Boxford, and on September 6, 1892, he married Carrie M. Locke. The following year his only child, Ruth, was born. It was in 1902 that he went to East Weymouth; in 1913 that he returned.

To avoid misconception one thing more needs to be said. Wherever

in this sketch I have spoken of Mr. Bradford the name should be understood as having a double meaning. Like Mr. and Mrs. Coggin, Mr. and Mrs. Bradford have been so united that it is impossible to think of one apart from the other. It is a joint service to the town which they have liberally rendered, and our gratitude goes forth to the pair as to a single benefactor.

G. H. PALMER

BOXFORD

August 25, 1925